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COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC LEADERSHIP: DOES PROBLEM CONTEXT MATTER?

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ABSTRACT: The potential solutions to many of society's most complex or 'wicked' problems lie beyond the boundaries of any single organization, profession or sector, the resultant interorganizational domains posing particular challenges for public leadership. The body of scholarship to explore and address the challenges of working with difference that are at the heart of a collaborative approach evolved earlier and, we argue, remains largely grounded in the social sector. Responding to a call for 'less silo-bound and more integrated research' into modern policymaking, our exploratory, comparative study of child protection and flood protection first highlights the strong parallels in the two domains and directs environmental managers and policymakers to the lessons they can gain from the accumulated scholarship on collaborative leadership. Secondly, due to the lack of comparative work to clarify ways in which the challenges might vary or contrast in the context of different inter-organizational domains, the comparative study also teases out differences, demonstrating that problem context does matter for collaborative leadership, that there are distinctive challenges for collaborative leadership in the flood protection domain with implications for both practice recommendations and theory building. For example, the technocratic tendencies of scientists and the dynamics of power and ideology, the historical alignment of the problem domain with neoliberalism, the potential protective international drivers and global imperatives of climate change and a consequent reversal in our direction of potential lessons to be transferred - to sustain policy innovation in the social domain. We uncover indications that collaborative leadership, which challenges organisational and professional cultures and the shift in values required to tackle wicked problems, surfaces most strongly from the voluntary sector – we finally uncover contractual differences and caution environmental voluntary sector leaders not to constrain innovation in the continued exploration of policy alternatives.

INTRODUCTION

Many of society's most complex 'wicked' (Rittel and Webber, 1973) problems demand a collaborative approach to public leadership (Crosby, 2010; Crosby and Bryson, 2005; Crosby and Bryson, 2010). Problems such as climate change, poverty, child wellbeing and elder care exist in inter-organizational domains (Trist, 1983). They are fraught with political and ethical dilemmas, with potential solutions lying beyond the boundaries of any single organization, profession or sector, posing particular challenges for public leadership, including accountabilities, structures, and decision-making processes (McGuire, 2006). To address these challenges, collaborative models of leadership explore the challenges of working with difference that are at the heart of a collaborative approach (Agranoff, 2006; Connelly, 2007; Crosby and Bryson, 2005; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; O'Leary and Bingham, 2009; Ospina and Foldy, 2010). In this paper, we begin to explore how collaborative leadership plays out in two seemingly very different policy domains; child protection and flood protection.

The paper stems from a shared research interest in collaborative governance and leadership, originating from our professional experiences. In terms of collaborative leadership, these are both inherently inter-organizational domains (Trist, 1983) that pose 'wicked' (Grint, 2010; Rittel and Webber, 1973) or 'adaptive' (Heifetz, 1994) problems, characterised by multiple, and dynamic, policy-driven partnerships between public agencies and their non-profit and private sector partners (Anning et al., 2006; Horwath and Morrison, 2007; Lewis, 2011; Milbourne et al., 2003; Percy-Smith, 2005). In early informal discussions we noted strong parallels, not only in the substantive issues faced by practitioners in the policy arrangements, but also in the dilemmas faced and challenges arising from adopting a collaborative approach. In contrast, our initial inquiries distinguished that the body of scholarship on inter-agency working grounded in the social sector commenced as early as the 1950s against a broad emergence of papers from empirical work in

the environmental sector circa the 1990's. Furthermore, we posit, the collaborative governance literature is still dominated by challenges and empirical work set in the social domain.

In an uncommon example of comparative work between the social and environmental domains, research by political scientists Meadowcroft (1999) and Gough (2015) add weight to our observations, in highlighting that the welfare state predates the environmental state by at least one generation and up to a century. In the nineteenth century UK, industrial capitalism brought social challenges with new resources to tackle them, welfare expanded and became an established feature in the post-Second World War period (Gough, 2015). By contrast, the environmental state developed later from the 1970's, initially through law, regulation and policy to clean up the polluted environment, then linked with broader social and economic concerns from the late 1980s under the global banner of 'sustainable development' (Meadowcroft, 1999 in Gough, 2015). Gough subsequently demonstrated that the development of the welfare state with its associated body of scholarship provides interesting parallels *and* lessons for environmental researchers studying the more recent emergence of the 'environmental state' (and by implication, less developed body of scholarship). We note Gough's call for a more collaborative approach to study between the welfare and environmental 'state', and in this paper we set out our response for 'less silo-bound and more integrated research' into modern policymaking (p43).

Given our prior research expertise and practitioner experience, we respond to Gough's call through a comparative study of child protection as a welfare state case and flood protection as an environmental state case. As the welfare state predates the environmental state, we first query - what lessons can environmental managers and policymakers, more specifically those in flood risk management, gain from the accumulated scholarship on collaborative leadership developed largely in the social welfare context? Secondly we note that whilst a growing body of research examines a collaborative approach to public leadership, there has been little comparative work to clarify ways in which the challenges might vary, diverge or contrast in the context of *different* inter-organizational domains, for example, due to their distinctive histories, structures, and organisational, professional and political backgrounds. If the initial assumption is that these 'state' contexts *are* greatly different, does the environmental problem domain pose distinctive challenges for collaborative leadership and if so, are there implications for both practice recommendations and theory building?

This conference paper offers our early thinking on this line of enquiry, and thus framing our near-term research agenda. We set out the two cases of child protection and flood protection from the social and environmental state contexts respectively, with a focus for the purposes of this paper being a discursive analysis of key government policy documents and a secondary analysis of our previous research (e.g. Jacklin-Jarvis 2014; 2015; Potter 2012; 2016) in the two inter-organizational domains. Our endeavour is to structure an account of each organisational domain that allows us to undertake the ensuing comparative analysis, in which we focus on the manner in which each 'wicked problem' domain is discursively constructed, the historical narrative of collaboration in each domain, and the current policy-driven structures of collaboration. This is followed by a discussion section in which we explore leadership implications. The review which first follows highlights theories which provide conceptual insight on the process and practice of public leadership (rather than person or position) in contexts of inter-organisational collaboration focused on these 'wicked' (Rittel and Webber, 1973) largely *social* problems. This brief summary is not an attempt to do justice to the breadth or diversity of the literature on inter-organisational collaboration and leadership. Instead, we aim to set out from the body of scholarship on collaborative leadership, an early indicative sample of potential lessons to be transferred from child protection to flood protection practitioners and policy makers and secondly, to tease out the relationship between the practice of collaborative public leadership and context - that is, in broader theoretical terms, does context matter for collaborative leadership, and if so how?

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

The collaborative leadership literature is closely associated with the concept of 'wicked' problems (Grint 2005b; 2010; Rittel and Weber 1973). Leadership that addresses these problems must attend to the interests of multiple stakeholders, 'nurturing' their engagement (Vangen and Huxham, 2003), whilst also attending to political and policy context (Crosby and Bryson 2005), and consequently to a context of continual

contestation (Hartley and Benington, 2011). We draw below on key understandings of leadership practice: that leadership is contextual (Osborn et al 2002, Osborn and Marion 2009); that leadership in inter-organizational domains is enacted through leadership media of structures, processes, and people (Huxham and Vangen 2000) and that the challenges of collaborative leadership relate to the particular structure of the collaboration (Provan and Kenis, 2008). As such, we draw attention to the practice and processes of such leadership and the nature of the inter-organisational relationship – specifically to the political and power dynamics which lie behind these relationships.

Who leads in inter-organisational collaboration?

The public administration literature presents the public sector manager as embedded in the bureaucracy and hierarchical structure of public agencies, but also increasingly engaged in a web of relationships across organisational boundaries, both within public agencies and beyond (e.g. Agranoff, 2006, 2007; Agranoff and McGuire, 2001, 2003; Bingham and O'Leary, 2008, 2009; O'Leary and Vij, 2012). These inter-organisational relationships extend beyond the contractual to joint service provision, co-management and a collaborative approach to policy implementation and strategy development.

However, leadership within inter-organizational domains is not only enacted by individuals from the public sector, nor is it entirely the prerogative of those individuals employed to lead a network or partnership (Huxham and Vangen, 2000, Ospina and Saz-Carranza, 2010, Saz-Carranza and Ospina, 2011, Vangen and Huxham, 2003a), if leadership is conceptualised as 'making things happen' (Huxham and Vangen, 2000), then it can be enacted by all participants from their different positions within the collaboration. While 'sponsors' lead from positions of status and authority, 'champions' act from commitment to social change rather than formal position (Crosby and Bryson, 2005). Indeed, the structures of collaboration bring together leaders and managers from different organizational and sectoral contexts, each with their own organizational and professional background and commitments, and each bringing their leadership practices and expectations to the collaboration. Of particular note, the voluntary sector literature focuses on the different demands on leaders from the sector who engage in collaboration, as they seek to represent their own organisation, the wider voluntary sector, and a cause or mission associated with those organisations, and with communities of interest or place (Bush, 2006, Gazley, 2008, Gazley, 2010, Goldman and Kahnweiler, 2000). In other words, the 'who' of leadership in the collaborative domain cannot be answered purely in terms of authority structures.

Roles and activities of leaders in collaborative contexts

The 'integrative leadership' literature (Crosby and Bryson, 2005; 2010a; 2010b) examines the role of leaders as change agents who employ their skills to achieve alignment and integration in the creation of public value. The work of integration brings together different organisations, smoothing difference, and aligning 'conditions, processes, structures, governance, contingencies and constraints, outcomes and accountabilities' (Bryson et al., 2006, p.52). Leadership 'elicits common goals, creates an atmosphere of trust, brokers organizational and individual contributions, and deploys energies in accord with some strategic plan' (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001, p.314). This synthesising work builds on that which is common to partners (Crosby, 2010), creating the environment for continuing collaboration, and ultimately delivering services which are experienced by users as 'seamless' (Connelly, 2007). Integrative leadership tactics include framing, convening, and deliberation, which influence stakeholder interpretations, leading to shared understanding and joint problem solving (Page, 2010).

Williams (2002; 2010; 2013) frames leadership in the collaborative domain as boundary spanning. Boundary spanners move from their own organisation into the collaborative space, and back again. They often have no formal power in terms of authority or hierarchical position and their authority does not reach into the partner agencies. However, boundary spanners seek to influence outcomes by drawing on sources of power which lie beyond the authority of public agencies and policy, including the power of meaning, control of information, expertise and knowledge (Williams, 2013). A similar emphasis on meaning-making is described by Ospina and Foldy (2010) in their concept of 'bridging'. Typically, this term describes the leadership practice of small social change organisations collaborating with dominant public agencies, they seek to take forward their mission by developing connectedness across organisational boundaries. Leaders

from often disempowered and resource poor, social change organisations 'build bridges' between competing perspectives, nurturing the development of interdependence, whilst continuing to advance their own organisational mission. Bridging practices include 'prompting cognitive shifts', 'naming and shaping identity', 'engaging in dialogue about difference', 'creating equitable governance mechanisms' and 'weaving multiple worlds together through interpersonal relationships' (Ospina and Foldy 2010). Similarly, Alexander et al's (2001) concept of 'collateral leadership' (Alexander et al., 2001), focuses on the informal influence of partnership participants who generate ideas, offer different perspectives, bring new knowledge to the partnership, and provide a conduit between formal leadership and wider stakeholders.

Leadership tensions and challenges

There are clearly strong drivers for organisations to engage in collaboration, to develop shared solutions to wicked problems. However, research suggests that the full potential of collaboration is rarely achieved. The processes of collaboration consume high levels of resources, participants frequently lose their initial energy and become discouraged, and as a result collaborative partnerships can enter a state of 'collaborative inertia' (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Cooperative approaches rest on an assumption that the interests and aims of the collaborating parties coincide, but in practice the interests of individual organisations can be distinct, are often in tension and can frequently conflict with those of the wider collaboration (Osborn and Marion, 2009; Vangen and Huxham, 2012). Cultural differences and practices (Vangen and Winchester, 2013), including the language of different professions and specialisms (Axelsson and Axelsson, 2009, Easen et al., 2000), hinder communication and shared understanding. These differences, including varied and complimentary expertise, are essential to progress on wicked problems, and collaborative advantage is achieved when organisations each bring their distinctive contribution to the whole (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). However, it is these very differences that can potentially bring conflict; the 'fundamental paradox at the heart of collaboration' (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). This tension, between the potential for 'collaborative advantage' and the tendency towards 'collaborative inertia' (ibid), must be actively managed by leaders who seek to influence and set the direction of the ongoing collaboration.

The focus on integration tends to associate collaborative leadership with 'collaborative' behaviours - behaviours which draw partners together, facilitate, encourage participation, and build trust (Lundin, 2007, Vangen and Huxham, 2003, Zhang and Huxham, 2009). However, there is also evidence that the work of facilitation may need to be accompanied by a persistent proactive, and even directive, leadership approach to make progress through collaboration and avoid inertia (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). Directive activities include 'manipulating the collaborative agenda' and 'playing the politics' (Vangen and Huxham, 2003), and the partnership manager is advised to work with the tension between facilitation and direction, operating from both perspectives, switching between them, or frequently acting from both perspectives simultaneously. Collaborative leadership involves working with conflict which inevitably arises from the different interests of the collaborating organisations, but doing so using skills of bargaining and negotiation (Feyerherm, 1994, Gray, 1989, O'Leary and Vij, 2012).

The power context for collaborative leadership

Inter-organizational domains are characterised by complex power dynamics that contextualise practice within the domain. Agranoff and McGuire (2001) argue that power must take centre stage in analyses of inter-organisational relationships. Collaboration can be understood as an endeavour to share power so that participants' powers are enhanced 'beyond the sum of their separate capabilities' (Crosby and Bryson 2005 p.29). Although Gray (1985) argues that the equal distribution of power can lead to inaction, sufficient distribution of power is argued to be necessary to allow all stakeholders to influence direction-setting. A significant power imbalance or asymmetry between partners may hinder successful collaboration, with weaker partners becoming dependent or vulnerable to the decisions of those who control resources (Gray and Hay, 1986).

In the public policy context, inter-organisational domains are frequently (even necessarily) characterised by power asymmetry, dominated by public agencies which are authorised by the state and control significant resources, on which other participants depend. For example, in collaboration between public and voluntary sectors, only the former carries the weight of state authorisation and resources (Clifford

et al., 2010, Craig et al., 2004; Lewis, 2005). The consequences of this imbalance are described in empirical studies such as Purdue's (2005) study of community leaders in the context of regeneration partnerships. Individuals, are frequently engaged in several government programmes with attendant partnerships and working groups. Due to frequent programme and policy changes, the structures of collaboration are fragile, unstable, and impermanent. The community leadership role is frequently an uncomfortable one, 'squeezed between incorporation into the structures of the state on the one hand and representation of the interests of often quite excluded elements of civil society on the other' (Purdue, 2005, p.248). Participants reported that they were given responsibilities but no authority, and the interests of the local authority dominated. Crucially, the roles open to community leaders are limited by their more powerful (public sector) partners. Purdue warns community leaders of the difficulties of working collaboratively with public agencies, pointing to the danger of co-option into the agenda of public agencies, and consequently of contributing to the maintenance of the status quo.

Such studies raise questions as to how collaboration proceeds in asymmetrical contexts, how individuals enact leadership and influence the collaborative agenda on behalf of less overtly powerful participants. Researchers do however offer alternative perspectives, recognising that power can operate at levels which lie beneath initial perceptions of the dominance of one participant or group of participants. Sources of power include formal authority, control of resources and state/policy legitimacy (Hardy and Phillips, 1998), but power also operates at the micro level of day to day interactions (ibid). Significant power and resources are brought to the table by apparently 'weaker' partners, for example through the power located in a community organisation's choice to participate or not and to its relationship with the community as both a resource and a source of legitimacy. Participants who appear less powerful may hold important resources of knowledge and information which shape the discourse, the naming and shaping of the issues on which the collaboration is focused, which are otherwise dominated by a public policy framing. Conversely, while the dominance of public agencies often appears clear as they draw on formal authority and control significant resources, public sector actors are also constrained in less obvious ways, related to the discursive power of public policy and to legitimacy. They are limited by expectations and processes, which policy demands, and society deems appropriate (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000) – including the expectations of political representatives or civil servants. Newman (2005) shows how public leaders drawn from different sectors, who are committed to transformational change, both make use of and are constrained by policy discourses.

CHILD PROTECTION (AS WELFARE STATE)

The 'Wicked Problem'

As a complex social problem, child protection is understood to be beyond the reach, resources, and ability of any single agency to resolve. It is often presented in policy (such as successive governments' *Working Together* guidance) as a problem to be solved through improved professional practice, and more specifically through improved inter-agency collaboration in the form of joint assessment, data sharing, and information exchange. Child deaths trigger government reviews that all too frequently identify failures in information sharing and coordination as contributory factors in the failure to protect (Parton 2004). They go on to call for new protocols and systems for information sharing and inter-agency coordination (see for example Munro, 2011).

However, as a 'wicked' problem, child protection can be understood in a rather more complex way. Rather than responding to the narrative of the need to 'rescue' children that is prevalent in the media, successive governments have attempted to position child protection in terms of society's wider responsibility to protect all children from harm. Preventing harm, rather than rescuing children after the event, means ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow up in contexts where they are cared for, nurtured, and supported to achieve their social, educational, and life goals (DCSF 2003, Allen 2011). It also means working with parents and carers to ensure they are able to provide a supportive, caring environment for children (DCSF 2007). 'Prevention' poses a much more complex societal problem than 'rescue'. It challenges society's values and practices, suggests that children (and parents) are the responsibility of all in society, and forces us to examine how and why some adults abuse children, and how we can prevent this. This is a task for multiple agencies, charities, community groups, and citizens (DCSF

2003, 2004, 2007, DfE 2011). The 'prevention' approach to child protection requires the commitment of resources and expertise from organisations and community groups beyond the state to provide supportive and early help services (Allen, 2011a). This raises further questions of coordination, as organisations with different values, purposes, and interests are asked to direct their resources towards a government-led protection agenda.

Drivers for and a shift to a collaborative approach

In the UK, the history of child protection can be traced to the nineteenth century and to the children's charities that arose in that period to care for the abandoned, orphaned, and poor. This historical narrative can be followed through the webpages of organisations that have adapted since this period (see for example <https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/about-us/our-history/>). While provider organisations offered care and relief from poverty, campaigning groups arose to protect children, for example, from inappropriate and exploitative employment. The state became a recognisable protector and provider for children as it introduced child employment legislation (for example the Factory Act 1833), and took responsibility for education, previously provided by charitable organisations (Education Act 1870). At this point, few charities received government funding (Prochaska 2006).

The Seebohm report of 1968 and consequent introduction of local social work departments in 1971 signalled a clearer role for the state in child protection (Parton 2009). Parton (2009) describes this as a move towards a preventative-focused, 'unified, community-based family service', responding to a perceived need for integration and coordination between different agencies. He then traces the endeavour to achieve integration through 40 years of social policy to Labour's 2008 'Think Family' policy to develop a coordinated support package around families in need. This 40 year period has been characterised by a proliferation of partnership agreements between state agencies and voluntary organisations for the delivery and coordination of services across a locality, with an increasing focus on formal commissioning arrangements. Throughout this period, the policy discourse moves continually between protection as 'rescue' and protection as 'prevention', with somewhat different implications for the state and non-state agencies that support children and families (Parton 2003, 2009, 2011). While the discourse of rescue focuses primarily on the coordination of state actors (social work, police, and health), the 'prevention' discourse draws attention to a wider group of actors beyond the state – in particular to the role of voluntary and community organisations.

The development of child protection as an inherently inter-agency or collaborative domain can be traced through successive government's *Working Together* documents (Parton 2011). *Working Together* is a policy document first issued by government in 1974, and revised by successive governments of all political hues, with the most recent version issued in 2015. It constitutes statutory guidance on inter-agency responsibilities and processes for coordination. The 'working together' policy discourse highlights the importance of information sharing across agency boundaries, and of practice that is child-centred rather than organisation or profession-centred in order to protect vulnerable children (see for example, DoH 1999, HM Govt 2006, 2015). This policy discourse is framed in early versions of *Working Together* as a response to the shock of exceptional cases, 'troubled families' and the deaths of individual children.

Government reviews identify failures in communication and information exchange between professionals as a key factor in the failure to protect children from harm, and argue for greater service integration to ensure their future protection (eg. Laming 2003, Munro 2011,). Since the 1990s, a feature of local children's services has been the proliferation of cross-sector partnerships required by government policy. Inter-agency Local Safeguarding Boards tasked with implementing *Working Together* have co-existed with a continually dynamic, often overlapping group of partnership bodies - Children's Trusts, Early Years and Childcare Partnerships, Youth Justice Partnerships (DCSF 2007). Although these bodies have reduced in number during the period of the post-2010 austerity governments, the policy imperative to collaborate has continued, framed by the austerity discourse as an imperative to share resources, acting early in a context of limited public resources (Allen, 2011b).

Indeed, the endeavour to achieve 'child-centred' integrated services can be seen as a discourse running through key policy documents since the 1990s. In this sense, policy in the child protection domain can be seen as framed by a moral imperative, continually turning attention back to the need to 'rescue'

children in need. However, this moral imperative sits alongside a more pragmatic approach in which the social welfare field is increasingly seen as an area of state provision which can potentially be opened up to the market. For example, local authorities have a duty to manage the 'market' of childcare services. However, until recently, child protection (rather than preventative) services have not been subject to pressures towards marketization.

Present day structures

The most recent version of *Working Together* (HMG 2015) reasserts the importance and responsibilities of Local Safeguarding Boards, partnership bodies led by the local authority, which must include representation from all key public agencies *and* voluntary and community organisations. It also attempts to construct a single narrative which links together 'prevention', 'protection' and 'rescue' as a child-centred continuum of integrated service provision across all sectors. In particular, 'early help' (prevention) is seen as task for coordinated action amongst state and non-state actors, although most of the detailed guidance relates to social work practice, which is still the responsibility of local authorities. However, in 2017, the potential outsourcing of child protection social work services is the focus of imminent legislation (*Social Work Bill 2017*). Since 2004, there has been a Children's Commissioner for England. Established by the Children Act 2004 (and reinforced in the Children Act of 2014) this role has no direct responsibility for service delivery, but is tasked with the promotion and protection of children's rights (www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk).

FLOOD PROTECTION (AS ENVIRONMENTAL STATE)

The 'Wicked Problem'

To better protect communities, homes and prime farmland against the threat of floods, current Government policy frames the problem as a need to rebalance and share management and responsibility of risk in a collaboration between the state, individuals, civil society and business (Defra, 2016). In delivering on and moving beyond the 'simple' problem and solution of engineered flood defences, the Government's stated aim to take an *integrated* approach to flood risk alleviation edges the framing closer to that of a 'wicked problem'. Longer term environmental planning views natural catchments are seen as the building block for integrated delivery and decision-making, the strategic emphasis lies with the integration of issues on the ground; improved protection against flooding and the support of a strong economy to be aligned with the delivery of a healthy environment, including water quality and avoidance of drought. However, this is seen to require 'joined-up' action at a local level, through bringing together business, environmental non-governmental organizations and others to deliver improvements to the environment 'through harnessing people's enthusiasm and connecting people with nature' (Defra, 2016).

The need for a shift in perspective to adaptive flood risk management is framed succinctly by Novotny *et al.* (2010). The traditional flood defence approach was developed around the confidence that nature functions according to known rules or laws, and that humans could thereby control nature in order to prosper just by increasing understanding of these laws and rules. As a 'wicked problem', Novotny *et al.* (2010) argue, this deterministic conception of nature needs to be thrown out, whereby nature (and climate change) should be seen as inherently variable, uncertain, and prone to unpredictable change. However, in policy and practice, the better use of technology and data remains a central priority in monitoring and modelling to reduce flood risk (Defra, 2016), thereby attempts persist by scientists to bring this uncertainty under control into a range of a so called predictable probability (Johnston *et al.*, 2000).

Governance and leadership problems typically emerge in reviews following shock flood events, noting the poor clarity in roles and responsibilities, a lack of transparency and accountability in national decision making and a lack of capacity and capability to deliver, particularly at the local authority level (e.g. see Pitt, 2008; EFRA, 2016).

Drivers for and a shift to a collaborative approach

The source of the traditional flood 'defence' discourse can be traced to the 18th century whereby early attempts to control urban rivers were linked to the pursuit of growth and the accumulation of capital. Initially new state legislation (Land Drainage Act 1930) gave engineers strong powers and large financial

resources to eliminate 'vast unhealthy washes' and 'swamps' to modernise and expand agricultural production (Potter, 2012). Shock flood events, including the dramatic East Coast storm of 1953, influenced the future trajectory of the flood defence discourse, a major state led capital investment strategy favouring structural flood defence solutions, dikes, dams, flood control reservoirs and diversions to protect homes and prevent repeat flood disasters. Other disciplines, including ecologists, geographers and planners immediately contested the hegemonic discourse, the embankment of rivers seen by these disciplines as an ecological barbarism and self-defeating (any benefits protecting development upstream could pass hazards and costs downstream to other less well protected communities). However, as development land in cities became increasingly valuable for development, the hegemonic engineering discourse meant the central issue remained one of a purely technical nature, to further straighten, dike and encase streams and rivers in order to decrease flood risk, many culverted and buried to make way for development and land owning interests (Novotny, 2010; Potter, 2012).

The global discourse of environmentalism and 'sustainable development' from the late 1980s and early 1990s backed and mobilised campaigners to rally strongly against the dominant pro-development agenda, led largely by voluntary and charitable organisations (e.g. the National Trust, RSPB, Rivers Trusts) on the issue of the loss of habitats in rivers and wetlands. EU Directives in the guise of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive (2001), Habitats Directive and the Water Framework Directive (2000), provided regulatory levers to safeguard to certain habitat and species. However sustainable development as a form of political ecological modernisation percolated the hegemonic flood defence discourse to also challenge the lack of co-ordination and 'silo' mentality within the sector. As Penning Rowsell et al. (1996) pointed out, the implementation of non-structural solutions depend for their implementation on more than one institution and as such are a much more complex process institutionally than structural, engineered, flood-defence measures, 'this means that the context of one institution's decisions, policies, and actions includes its partners' institutions and their characteristics' (p86).

Following further shock flood events in the late 1990s and turn of the century flood defences were pronounced to be inefficient (too expensive) and they lost some political legitimacy. The engineering dominated sector became more responsive to ecological arguments campaigned for by the voluntary sector organisations. Defra's subsequent new strategy 'Making Space for Water' (2005) fell in line with the recently published UK sustainable development strategy, 'Securing the Future'. The need to adapt to climate change and build adaptability into risk management measures was announced by the government minister; adopting a more 'holistic approach' to achieve a better balance between the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, environmental and social), making more use of a portfolio of measures to achieve multiple objectives, and also seeking to make the involvement of stakeholders more effective at all levels of decision making (Defra, 2005). The more innovative approach to flood risk management implied practices that take into account different sorts of knowledge and allow for debate. However one informant described the 'peculiar power relationship from EA; they see themselves as a decision maker but want co-delivery (not co-decision maker)' (Potter, 2012). Despite a 'shift in governance' to partnership working, attempts at policy integration are constrained by a power differential and long term ideological (and political) biases to structural solutions (*ibid*).

Whilst existing state policy-making practices were challenged to shift from a purely technocratic focus, based on engineering expertise to open up and encompass multi-disciplinary perspectives and participatory approaches, it was the shock events of the 2007 floods that put the media and political spotlight on the lack of co-ordination and fragmented responsibilities of flood risk management agencies (Pitt, 2008). The extensive flooding and subsequent Pitt Review (2008) led to more fundamental legislative change in the Flood and Water Management Act of 2010 which highlighted the need for authorities responsible for managing flood risk to 'co-operate better' (EA, 2011). The Act identified new responsibilities and called for interactions between all relevant flood risk management authorities to be intensified, through a 'duty to co-operate' in sharing data and information.

Present day structures

Defra remains the lead government department and develops flood risk management policy. Following Pitt's (2008) recommendation, the national government agency, the Environment Agency has been given the strategic overview for flood risk management, also responsible for flood risk management activities (mainly regulatory) on main rivers. At a regional level, Flood and Coastal Committees play the co-ordination role in flood risk management, by advising on and approving the implementation of programmes of work for their areas. Local democratic input is provisioned through the majority membership of representatives from Lead Local Flood Authorities. The Local Authority based 'lead' local flood authorities (LLFAs) are a new actor dating from 2011, and work closely with the longstanding Regional Flood and Coastal Committees to prepare and maintain a strategy for flood risk management at a local level and how it will be managed in 'partnership' in their areas. As regarding the overarching 'wicked problem' of climate change adaptation, loosely framed and non-mandatory state based strategy sees Local Authorities as 'community leaders', in which they should play a 'pivotal role in leading, supporting and driving delivery' of adaptation actions and increasing local resilience. 'Working together' with businesses and communities is seen as important 'to drive down costs while meeting local needs and priorities', a responsibility in actual effect increasingly taken on by voluntary 'Flood Action Groups' in communities hit and galvanised by flood events.

The more holistic and ecologically driven discourse on integrated water management now sits somewhat detached from the main flood protection institutional structures, within Defra's remit named the 'Catchment Based Approach' (CaBA). This is led almost exclusively by voluntary sector organisations, for example by Rivers Trusts and Wildlife Trusts. Collaboration and partnership are explicitly stated to be essential for this approach (Defra, 2011). An independently commissioned evaluation of the pilots and guidance raises the issues that working collaboratively requires commitment, that to be effective tensions and potential conflicts should be recognised and ways found to discuss issues of power and responsibility (<http://www.fwr.org/WQreg/Appendices/The-Guide.pdf>). Whilst technical competencies are seen as vital, the evaluation of pilots also highlighted the co-ordinating role as being crucial to success. 'Collaborative leadership' is seen as a priority to give 'status, influence and visibility' and provide the 'collaboration skills to bring people together'. The key driver is delivery of WFD water quality targets and pressures affecting biodiversity and fisheries, linking to the EA's formal activities on River Basin Management Plans, within which the EA will publish 'formal recognition' of the appropriate CaBA partnership activities. Guidance regarding flood risk management targets multiple benefits, e.g. sediment management, framing such collaborative efforts to 'significantly reduce costs' for Local Authorities and a potential vehicle for applying for Grant in Aid from their state partners. Whilst Defra provided initial seedcorn funding and provides a small grant, the current policy framework states that catchment partnerships 'will need to secure long term, self-sustaining, local funding arrangements'.

Further changes are also in hand within Defra's internal structures, to be structured around river catchments and landscapes, with joined-up delivery plans and (another) 25-year plan for the environment soon to be published (Defra, 2016). The Government's latest National Flood Resilience Review (2016) in contrast targets improvements in modelling future rainfall and climate scenarios, the use of temporary defences, communicating risk to the public and improving emergency response. However, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee reports this as insufficient to deliver a holistic approach to flood 'prevention' (EFRA, 2016). Lacking insight and guidance to collaborative governance and leadership per se, instead the EFRA report calls for another overhaul in governance structures and changes to flood delivery body roles. A proposed new National Floods Commissioner role is viewed to ensure a cross-government focus, with an objective and balanced, long-term view of flood risk, to ensure full accountability and transparency of delivery by the full range of national flood risk management bodies.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS - DISCUSSION

The policy drivers and structures for collaborative governance and leadership have undoubtedly emerged earlier for child protection within the welfare state context than flood risk management within the environmental state context. Child protection was an established feature within the welfare state by the 1970s, inter-agency working across public and third sectors has become firmly embedded and institutionalised for approaching half a century. Whilst flood protection as 'defence' emerged from the

1950s, this was firmly established within a silo'd engineering domain, the need for integration and partnership working only emerging in the late 1980s driven by the global discourse of sustainable development. Even so, at this point in time the environmental focus was more on the integration of science. Shock events in the child sector have led to stronger frameworks for co-ordination over decades, whereas the policy drivers and statutory basis for collaborative working are only evident from following the shock flood events in the summer of 2007 and the subsequent findings of the Pitt Review (2008). Even in 2016, Defra's optimistic aim to 'harness people's enthusiasm' contrasts starkly with the DofE's 'Working Together' document (2016), evidencing practitioner guidance for inter-agency working from as early as 1974. Whilst further work is required to evidence the level of contemporary collaborative leadership research and recommendations emerging specifically from the environmental domain, our initial inquiry would thus suggest that inter-agency working in the social domain is paralleled by a more highly developed body of collaborative governance literature, from which public sectors leaders charged with collaborative working for flood risk management have many 'conceptual handles' to grasp from the body of scholarship.

Interesting parallels and lessons to be gained?

From our initial early exploratory analysis, both child and flood protection are dominated by public sector actors. Whilst flood protection is led from a national level by the Environment Agency (of which leadership implications remain to be explored), as with the social state based child protection, these flood protection actors also find themselves engaged in a web of relationships across organisational boundaries, both within public agencies and beyond. Albeit instructed by Defra and the EA, new legislation drives a collaborative approach to local strategy development and policy implementation (as per Agranoff, 2006, 2007; Agranoff and McGuire, 2001, 2003; Bingham and O'Leary, 2008, 2009a; O'Leary and Vij, 2012). 'Champions' from voluntary sector organisations in both sectors act not just to commitment to social change (Crosby and Bryson, 2005) but also to environmental change. The CaBA practitioner guidance on collaborative working targeted at the voluntary sector is the most developed guidance (if not the only guidance, again subject to further enquiry), flagging the approach as not being 'a traditional or conventional way of working, not relying on one expert organization to define what needs to be done (clearly the EA), but bringing together multiple and often conflicting interests to prioritise and integrate actions. As 'change agents', as well as benefitting from further guidance and tactics from the 'integrative leadership' literature (e.g. Crosby and Bryson, 2005; 2010a; 2010b) these leaders could benefit from new perspectives on 'bridging' (Ospina and Foldy, 2010) and 'collateral leadership' (Alexander et al., 2001). Likewise understanding the 'fundamental paradox at the heart of collaboration' and actively managing then tension between the potential for 'collaborative advantage' and the tendency towards 'collaborative inertia' (Huxham and Vangen, 2005), potentially adopting collaborative thuggery techniques when necessary to manipulate the collaborative agenda, to understand and play the politics (Vangen and Huxham, 2003).

In both child and flood protection, the relentless rolling back of the state and austerity measures undermines the capacity of public sector leaders to address wicked problems. Flood protection leaders in the public sector should be aware of the implications of the power differential that in seeing their voluntary sector as a 'cheap' policy delivery solution, undermines the discursive leadership power of their new partners to bring about transformational change, otherwise dominated by a public policy framing. Likewise voluntary sector leaders should understand and harness their power to make a difference, to 'make things happen' (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000; Newman, 2005).

Distinctive challenges and implications for collaborative leadership

In addition to identifying parallels and lessons to be drawn, we also set out to identify and clarify the ways in which the challenges might vary, diverge or contrast in the context of these different inter-organizational domains, through their distinctive histories and structures, organisational, professional and political backgrounds. The analysis has raised significant differences, which we can largely attribute to the timescale gap between distinguishing historical economic contexts when partnership working emerged in each 'state'. Hence, we do argue that yes, problem context does matter for collaborative leadership and that there are distinctive challenges for collaborative leadership in the environmental 'state', with potential implications for theory building.

Science, Power and Ideology

Discourse analysis further highlights important distinctions between the power dimensions and conflicting ideologies in these two domains. Whilst we have seen similar power dynamics playing out in child and flood protection between the public and voluntary sector, we focus here on the 'scientific', in particular engineering, discourse of flood management and the problems of reaching consensus. Engineers and hydraulic modellers retain the monopoly on knowledge claims, their technocratic tendencies within the structures of flood risk management decision making maintaining power over the arrangement. Although we note the role of medicine and medics in the child protection policy arrangement, Gough (2015) has also asserted that science and scientists play a role in defining, measuring, modelling, and mitigating climate change in a manner that is un-paralleled in the social policy arena. Hajer's (1997) earlier work on environmental pollution demonstrated deep-seated problems involved in reaching a consensus in the complex and multi-faceted environmental policy field, 'even when working for the same employer' (Hajer 1997 in Fischer, 2003, p110), as can clearly be seen within the Environment Agency. Biologists, ecologists, planners, hydrologists and engineers have very different modes of reason, conceptions of science and how it is practiced, which leads to fundamental disagreements. The actors from different disciplines construct their arguments around flood risk management so differently, that there is a fundamental problem in reaching any agreement about the very nature of the problem. For 'flood protection', who are we protecting – communities or ecology, but undoubtedly not the protection for rivers to naturally flood? Contrast this with the social welfare state context; the goal to protect children is clear and certainly not contested. Fundamentally, flood management is framed as a scientific problem to be solved, while child protection is framed as a social problem. Scientists hold the power and play the 'lead' role in framing the issue, modelling and providing the 'solution'. The often accompanying lack of 'social awareness' and insight affects any potential transfer of insight and training from the body of scholarship in, for example, management and public administration. We would argue the dynamics of power and ideology in the flood protection domain lead to at the least a *more* significant challenge, if not a contextually different set of challenges for collaborative leadership researchers to contemplate.

Neoliberalism

Flood risk management and wider climate adaptation agendas have developed in a later era of dominant neo-liberalism, in which Gough (2015) highlights the wider UK context of denigration of state capacities and hostility to public initiatives. In contrast to the Welfare State, founded in an earlier Keynesian era, environmental ideologies and goals often challenge and conflict with the dominant economic framework and the unchallenged assumption of continuing economic growth (Gough, 2015). Vested land owning and property interests, with strong neoliberal ideological links with neighbouring government departments (CLG and the Treasury), means this largely unchallenged economic growth plays out in often unsustainable development on the floodplain. This sets up somewhat different expectations for what can be achieved through a collaborative approach rather than direct public management, given land owners and developers in their pursuit of profit lack the time and inclination to drive policy innovation and to sit at the collaborative table. In addition, business interests have played a more explicit role in shaping wider environmental policy compared with social policy (Gough, 2015). For example, the shift in emphasis within the flood risk management policy arrangement to 'resilience' is firmly aligned with neo-liberalism, shifting the attention from flood management to the citizens at (and put at) risk of flooding (Butler and Pidgeon, 2011). In rebalancing the relationship between government, individuals and business, property level resilience measures can enable innovation, boosting skills and open up new markets (Defra, 2016) and re-directing attention from the wicked problem and solution. Furthermore, the embeddedness and institutionalisation of inter-agency working from an earlier Keynesian era before neo-liberal ideas became more dominant within economic and social policymaking (Gough, 2015) could arguably protect the genuine desire to work together in child protection, despite ongoing political 'interference' to policy and structures.

Global Drivers and Policy Diffusion

Although policy is influenced by the political, economic, societal and institutional characteristics of a nation state, the increasing globalisation of communication through international organisations, trans-national advocacy networks and international conferences, means new environmental approaches and best practice, institutional innovations and policy outputs spread internationally, in the process of ‘policy diffusion’ (Warner et al., 2012). Collaborative arrangements in flood protection can be seen as part of a global trend emerging from the re-framing of the environmental agenda from the late 1980s. The novel IWRM approaches, European policy (particularly the Water Framework Directive) and the global discourse of climate change lent growing recognition that flood risk management was seen to require the integration of multiple disciplinary perspectives. The international dimension to the environmental state is seen by Gough (2015) as integral to most environmental issues and absolutely central to climate change, in major contrast to the welfare state as having been predominantly driven by domestic factors. Gough (2015) postulates that although austerity measures and the rolling back of state functions damages both welfare and state policy arrangements, the international drivers and global imperative of climate change may sustain environmental policy innovation. This remains to be seen in the post-truth era of politics and the re-working of environmental policy following the UK’s exit from the EU.

Unexpected findings and leadership implications

Despite the greater experience in inter-agency working in the child protection domain, our initial analysis witnesses the drive for ‘greater policy learning’ and a more holistic ‘prevention’ discourse only in more recent years, that is, post-dating and trailing the shift from flood defence to a holistic approach to integrated water management by at least a decade. As with other environmental challenges, the wicked problem of climate change adaptation brings great uncertainty and complexity to the leadership challenge, arguably to a much greater extent (Gough, 2015) than to our understanding and tackling of threats to children’s welfare. We have already documented that flood risk leaders can turn to a key focus of the collaboration literature, to understand the potential for partners with different resources and perspectives to achieve synergy and collaborative advantage; and the potential for those differences to pull partners apart. Further research is required to validate, but we postulate that the longer-standing, internationally driven and potentially greater extent of environmental policy innovation (and more so consideration of the barriers to innovation), is mirrored in the body of environmentally embedded contemporary scholarship. This raises a potential transfer of lessons and theory building in the opposite direction to that originally expected, from environmental to welfare state focused practitioners and leadership researchers. For example from the policy transitions literature.

We uncovered unexpected similarities between the two state domains when approaching them through the lens of discourse, that is the underlying shift and the significance of discourses of ‘protection’ and ‘defence’, versus ‘prevention’ and ‘integrated flood risk management’ as drivers for collaboration in both domains. This observation highlights very different expectations for the processes of collaboration, strongly paralleled in the two domains. ‘Protection’ and ‘defence’ highlights the importance of developing processes of information sharing, knowledge exchange, and coordination, in the endeavour to stop harm. It results in barriers, and emergency procedures. In contrast, the prevention discourse leads collaborating partners towards a more fundamental, longer-term, and re-examination of purpose, culture, and values. The latter constitutes an enormous challenge for public leaders who endeavour to facilitate collaborative partnerships. This raises questions such as, what is the role of representatives of public agencies in leading partnerships towards this level of re-examination, and how do they do this in ways that are participative and respectful of partner differences? How to facilitate this between partners whose discourse focuses on ‘rights’ (of the child, of landowners, of citizens), and those looking for a process solution? This raises the game (and skill level) for collaborative public leadership beyond the (already complex) task of inter-organizational exchange and coordination.

The literature has also pointed us towards the significance of discursive framing as an activity of collaborative leadership. Whilst the paper is focused on public leadership and we frame the above as an enormous challenge for public leaders, we suggest that there is some indication that collaborative leadership

which challenges organisational and professional cultures and the shift in values required to tackle wicked problems, may in fact surface most strongly from the voluntary sector. Voluntary sector leaders are seen facing our different values and views on childcare, and are likewise leading the ecologically motivated discourse and challenging limits to growth. We note that child protection has developed a mode of public financing and provisioning on a grand scale, as per the wider welfare state (Gough, 2015). Although providing much needed resources, we witness the considerable impact of this arrangement of being contracted to deliver services on behalf of public agencies (with which they also partner) on the voluntary sector. Power imbalance, potential loss of identity in delivering on government set targets, being seen as a 'cheap' alternative, continual policy change causing uncertainty through the growing dependence on contracts – a cautionary tale perhaps for environmental sector associates. Having developed in the later neoliberal era, the similar 'gap filling' role for the voluntary sector in flood risk brings little financial reward from the state. We postulate that, rather than been seen as a negative outcome, financial independence (albeit with another set of power dynamics/loops and hoops from alternative sources such as the Heritage Lottery Fund), frees the ongoing critical examination of the discourses that frame the flood risk problem domain and not to elude differences and constrain innovation in the continued exploration of policy alternatives.

CONCLUSION

Our initial analysis has focused attention on the similarities and differences between the welfare and environmental sectors; the factors that frame the day to day context for practice in an inter-organizational domain; the distinctive structures of collaboration, organisational context, nature of the problem, and the particular mix and professional backgrounds of collaborating stakeholders. Whilst both are policy domains beset by 'wicked problems' that require the attention and cooperation of actors from different organisations and professions, within and beyond state agencies, we find the leadership/context question is significant for research within inter-organisational collaboration to address complex problems. There may be lessons to be transferred from the welfare to the environmental state context, but we have also found potential learning in environmental policy innovation that could be pertinent to the social welfare domain. A key finding is that we should be careful about simply and uncritically transferring practice advice from one domain to the other. We raise questions as to whether and which leadership practices are 'best' in a specific collaborative setting. The broader state context, historical and contemporary, has emerged as a key factor in our analysis and whilst the discourse and policy drivers persist on collaboration and inter-agency working persist, we will continue with our research endeavour to surface issues of context. However, with the obvious limitation affecting the conclusions of our research being the focus on only two particular sectors, child and flood protection, we also call for further comparative work representing how public and voluntary sector leaders enact their roles in the social and environmental contexts, analysing the impact of these very different state structures on the practice of collaborative leadership.

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